

Don't Toss Your Cookies! Food Safety Prevents Illness During the Holidays

DOVER – During the holidays it seems like an opportunity to eat awaits around every corner. Whether preparing food for the office gathering, a holiday party, or the big family dinner, the Division of Public Health (DPH) urges you to take precautions so you “Don’t toss your cookies this holiday season!”

An estimated 48 million cases of foodborne illness occur each year in the U.S., in some cases resulting in hospitalization or even death.

(DPH) is offering tips to help Delawareans safely prepare holiday foods. You can help reduce the risk of contracting or spreading these illnesses by:

- Always using soap and warm water to wash hands,
- Thoroughly cleaning and sanitizing the sink, cutting boards, utensils and anything else that comes in contact with raw meats and their juices,
- Using separate utensils and cutting boards for meats and ready-to-eat foods such as vegetables and cooked poultry,
- Washing fruits and vegetables before eating,
- Cooking all meats and eggs thoroughly to kill bacteria,
- Refrigerating leftovers promptly. Do not leave food at room temperature for extended periods of time.

When it comes to hosting any gathering where foods are served buffet style, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) shares these helpful pointers:

Serve It Up Right:

- Hot foods should be kept at an internal temperature of 140° F or warmer. Use a food thermometer to check. Serve or keep

food hot in chafing dishes, slow cookers, and warming trays.

- Be aware that some warmers only hold food at 110° F to 120° F, so check the product label to make sure your warmer has the capability to hold foods at 140° F or warmer. This is the temperature that's required to keep bacteria at bay!

Chill Out

- Cold foods should be kept at 40° F or colder.
- Keep cold foods refrigerated until serving time.
- If food is going to stay out on the buffet table longer than two hours, place plates of cold food (like cream based dips) on ice to retain the chill.

Keep It Fresh

- Don't add new food to an already-filled serving dish. Instead, replace nearly-empty serving dishes with freshly-filled ones.
- Be aware that during the course of the party, bacteria from people's hands can contaminate the food. Plus, bacteria can multiply at room temperature.

Watch the Clock

Remember the 2-Hour Rule: Discard any perishables left out at room temperature for more than two hours, unless you're keeping it hot or cold.

If You're Preparing the Big Dinner, Let's Talk Turkey:

- If you plan to buy a fresh turkey, purchase it only 1-2 days prior to cooking, and make sure it remains refrigerated until ready to cook.
- Avoid fresh pre-stuffed turkeys, because harmful bacteria can grow in the stuffing. Be sure you have a roasting pan large enough to hold your turkey and a food thermometer.
- Thaw:
 - In the refrigerator: allow approximately 24 hours per 4 -5 pounds of turkey. A thawed turkey can remain in the refrigerator for 1-2 days.
 - Under cold running water (70F or below): completely submerge

bird under running water in the original wrapper; cook immediately after thawing – do not refreeze.

- In the microwave: by removing outside wrapping and placing on a microwave-safe dish. Do not refreeze or refrigerate after thawing in the microwave.

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- Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of the turkey, preferably in the innermost part of the thigh and wing, and the thickest part of the breast. A whole turkey is safe when cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165 F throughout the bird. Do not depend on the color of the meat to determine if the bird is thoroughly cooked. The meat of smoked turkey is always pink.

- Any turkey, stuffing, or gravy needs refrigeration within two hours of cooking. Use separate shallow containers. Use leftover turkey and stuffing within seven days (sooner is better), or freeze these foods. Reheat thoroughly to a temperature of 165 F, or until hot and steaming.

Ultimately remember, if it doesn't look, smell or taste right, don't eat it! But just because it smells okay it doesn't mean it is safe to eat which is why it is so critical to follow food safety guidance. For more information on holiday food preparation, visit the [FDA website](#). For information on food safety in Delaware visit the [Office of Food Protection](#).

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.